

The Muslim Marriage Guide

Ruqayyah Waris Maqsood

amana publications

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First published 1995 by
The Quilliam Press Ltd.,
80 Lamble Street,
London NW5 4AB

Reprinted 1999

US edition published 2000 by
amana publications
10710 Tucker Street
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2223 USA
Tel: (301) 595-5777 Fax: (301) 595-5888
Email: amana@igprinting.com • Website: amana-publications.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Maqsood, Ruqaiyyah Waris.
The Muslim marriage guide / Ruqayyah Waris Maqsood.
p. cm.
Originally published: London : Quilliam Press, 1995.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-915957-99-X
1. Marriage--Religious aspects--Islam. 2. Family--Koranic teaching.
I. Title.
HQ525.I8 M35 2000
297.5'77--dc21

00-064371

*I will lie down with my love
upon this bed of petals.
If there are thorns
I will not feel them;
or if I feel them,
I will not show that
I feel them*

R. W. M.

Printed in the United States by
International Graphics
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2223 USA
Tel: (301) 595-5999 • Fax: (301) 595-5888
Email: ig@igprinting.com • Website: www.igprinting.com

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1 *Getting Married*

'And We have created everything in pairs, that perhaps you may remember.' (Quran, 51:49)

So you are getting married? Congratulations, and may God bless you and bring you and your chosen partner to a long and happy life together!

Leaving your childhood behind, and becoming man and wife together, is the most important step short of actually becoming Muslim that any human being can take in the interests of their own happiness and wellbeing.

'And among Allah's signs is this: that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you might find rest in them; and He has set between you love and compassion. Truly there are signs in this for people who reflect.' (Quran, 20:21)

'Our Lord, grant us the delight of our eyes from our wives and our offspring ...' (Quran, 25:74)

Marriage is such an important step that our Blessed Prophet (ﷺ) spoke of marriage as being 'half the religion': 'Whoever has married has completed half of his religion; therefore let him fear Allah in the other half!' (Bayhaqi)

You have only to use your eyes and your ears, and consider the marriages of those people you know in your own circle of family, friends and acquaintances, to know that this is so.

If your marriage is happy and fulfilled, then no matter what troubles may beset you, no matter what hardships you are obliged to face as you pass along your road of life, no matter what sicknesses

or distressing circumstances, you will always face them as if your back were against a protecting fortress, inside the walls of which you may set aside all the terrors and traumas for a while, and be loved.

But marriage is also a most demanding training-ground of faith. By claiming it to be 'half the religion' the Blessed Prophet was not making an idle statement. When a human couple strive hard to get their marriage and family right in the eyes of God, they are indeed well on the road to Paradise.

For it is love which makes a marriage - not a soppy, sentimental kind of romantic dream, but the sort of love which will roll up its sleeves and get stuck into the mess; the sort of love which will hang on to you when everyone else has turned against you and is speaking wrongly of you, while you have confidence that your partner (who knows you better than any person) will justify that confidence, and spring to your defence.

Sounds too good to be true? Those of you who have grown up in unhappy circumstances, in families shaken by frustrations and depressions, where the adults were bitter and cynical, and over-authoritarian, may well wonder if it is possible to have such a loving relationship with another human being.

By the grace of God, it is possible, and it is what Allah intended for you, by the practice of Islam which is submission to His compassionate will.

But a happy marriage is not simply 'made in Heaven'. It does not just happen by accident.

You could go into a most beautiful garden and be amazed at the profusion and lushness of the flowers, the neatness of the borders and grasses, the absence of marauding insects and pests - and you would never for a moment think that this had come about by accident. You would know, straight away, that the garden had been created by a person or team of people who *loved* gardening, and no matter what the setbacks and problems were determined to produce a thing of great beauty and joy. A marriage is cultivated in exactly the same way.

You have to be able to see in your mind's eye the sort of garden/marriage you would like to have when it is finished, and aim towards it. If events turn out slightly differently to what you

expected, it does not matter all that much, because your master-plan will be there to keep you heading in the right direction, and all unexpected events will simply be incorporated into moving towards this plan.

Carrying on with the garden imagery, you have to be able to recognise the seeds that you are planting, and weed out the plants you don't want before they cause trouble. Some seeds develop into beautiful flowers, while others are troublesome weeds - like bind-weed, which climbs over everything else and chokes it, until the garden is buried and destroyed.

You have to be on the alert for invasions of malicious pests which, although they are themselves claiming a right to live, are nevertheless gaining their living at the expense of yours, and are ruining the things you have planted.

You have to keep an eye on the weather, and when there is not enough rainfall, you must do the long chore of going round the garden yourself carrying water, making sure everything is all right. In a long, dry spell, this might mean a great deal of drudgery - but you know that without it your garden will fail and die. It is up to you to keep everything going.

All devout Muslims, men and women, should remember this fact, in case they think that in marriage God has granted them something in which they can just lounge about and 'watch the flowers grow'. God never grants human beings this privilege. Whatever they have that gives them pleasure, they have to work for it - they really have to earn the right to be its steward.

Everything in life is a gift, and does not belong as of right to any person. Even your body is a gift, enjoyed (or not enjoyed!) by your soul for the duration of its sojourn on earth. It is not there as a permanent feature of the universe; in fact, there are *no* permanent features of the universe - not even the rocks from which the great mountains are formed!

God has made us stewards, the *khulafa*; the guardians of this wondrous planet and its life-forms. And the most important life-form that we will ever have to cherish is our own partner, our husband or wife. From that person, we are intended to produce in love the Muslims of the next generation, and set them on their own ways with our examples and encouragement. With that person, we are supposed to build up our own lives, free from fears and

resentments and uncertainties, so that we can concentrate on filling our 'space' with love and the service of God.

This is why marriage is 'half the religion'. Islam is intended to cover every aspect of a believer's life, twenty-four hours per day. Our relationship with our life-partner and family certainly accounts for at least half of this time, and for some women, it occupies one hundred percent of their time.

We neglect this most vital charge laid upon us at our peril. No human being was intended to live in isolation- either splendid isolation, thinking himself or herself 'better' than the common herd in any way, or in grief-stricken isolation, deprived of life's comforts and the satisfying of natural appetites and needs. God created Man and Woman from a single soul, and He intended them to live and work together.

'O humanity; fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its spouse, and from the two of them did spread forth a multitude of men and women.' (4:1)

'We created you from a single pair of male and female'. (49:13; see also 35:11)

In this is a sure sign. Each is necessary to the other. People may live and work and have faith on their own, but it is only a 'half-life'.

As any single person, or widow living alone, or abandoned half of a couple will tell you, it is *possible* to survive and live by yourself, and even to wring some enjoyment out of this life - for you are free to be selfish and do the things you want to do without much consideration of the needs and wants of others. But there is a terrible price for this solitary existence.

It is like a blind person developing extra-sensitive hearing in order to compensate and cope with lack of sight; or a paralysed person in a wheelchair developing extra-large arm muscles to make up for the lack of legs. It can be done - but it is a miserable and long process.

Married life brings its pressures, but it can also provide the kind of relaxation that human beings naturally need. Imam al-Ghazali observes that:

'One of the benefits of marriage is the enjoyment of the company and the sight of one's spouse, and by shared amusement, whereby the heart is refreshed and strengthened for worship; for the soul is prone to boredom and is inclined to shun duty as something

unnatural to it. If forced to persevere in something it dislikes, it shies and backs away, whereas if it is revived from time to time by pleasures it acquires new strength and vigour.'

(*Ihya Ulum al-Din*)

The sign and the design that God intended is that it is best for men and women to come together as a team.

People work together as all sorts of teams - they cooperate for the sake of games and sport; they unite to do a task too great for an individual, like building a house; they sort themselves out into managers and workers in order to create businesses and earn a living. But the most fundamental team of all, and the one which is the most important, is that of a man and woman deciding to live together in one space as husband and wife.

2 *The Key to a Happy Marriage*

'Actions are only (judged) by intentions; each person shall be rewarded only for that which he intended.'

(Bukhari and Muslim)

All human beings share the same basic needs - to feel needed, to be appreciated, respected and loved. Without these needs, a human being cannot really be said to be human. And the most obvious thing about these needs is that they all depend absolutely on the relationship of one person with another.

So basic are they that one can surely take evidence from them that the need for people to find partners, and mate, and interact together with each other and then in the creation of happy, stable families, is intended by our Creator as a sign.

The family is the oldest of all human institutions, and entire civilisations have flourished or disappeared depending on whether family life was strong or weak. Yet all over the world today, and not just in the West, families are breaking down and societies are disintegrating into confusion and despair. Hence the central importance which Islam attaches to family values, and to the art - and it is an art - of making this most basic of all relationships work.

Embarking on a marriage is really very similar to beginning the construction of a building. The building may be extremely magnificent and grand, but the most important thing about it is the foundations upon which it is built. If those foundations are not secure, the building will not survive when the storms and shocks of

stress hit it, as they inevitably will sooner or later.

What does a husband need to do in order to gain his wife's respect? And why does it matter so much to him? And why does a woman have such a powerful need for a husband's love? How can she earn it, and keep him faithful to her? Our Lord has revealed guidelines for human life together since the dawn of time, and for over fourteen centuries Muslims have had the example of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Wise counsel on how to build the foundations of a marriage, and then to create a happy family, have been freely available for anyone to consult. Muslims believe that whether people follow these guidelines or not actually determines not only their earthly happiness, but also their eternal fate once their earthly life is finished.

There are really two keys to a happy marriage. The first is to love Allah, and to seek to apply His principles in every situation and relationship. The second is to do a little sensible soul-searching and analysis before embarking on such an important enterprise - one that is going to be the most profound commitment in the whole of your life, and is going to affect the lives and wellbeing of so many people, not only your own!

What does a person want from marriage? Before committing themselves to a life-partner, every individual should try to sit down calmly and become conscious of what their needs really are, and consider whether or not the proposed partner is going to prove likely to be able to fulfil those needs. These needs are not just for a man to have a cheap servant or concubine (a maid, or an available sex-partner for whenever he feels 'in the mood'); or for a woman to have someone to shower her with gifts, clothes, jewellery and flowers, or to provide the means for her to cradle in her arms a beloved baby (a sugar-daddy or a stud-bull). The needs amount to much more than that. They are physical, emotional, and also spiritual.

What are your values and your goals, and how do you expect to achieve them? You have to know yourself pretty well, and also have a fair idea of whether or not your intended spouse understands them and is willing and able to satisfy them.

Furthermore, if your marriage is to be successful, you must also be considerate towards the legitimate needs of your partner, and not just look to your own gratification. If you are going to be happy,